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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 ADDIS ABABA 003200

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USAID FOR ADMINISTRATOR-DESIGNATE FORE;
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CJTF-HOA AND USCENTCOM FOR POLADS;
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GENEVA FOR NKYLOH, RMA;
ROME FOR HSPANOS;
USUN FOR TMALY;
NSC FOR BJPITTMAN, CHUDSON, AND JMELINE; AND
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [ET](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: THE OGADEN HAS REACHED CRISIS LEVEL; GOE IMPEDING RELIEF

REF: A. ADDIS 2805
[1](#)B. ADDIS 3005

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (U) This is an Action Request; please see paragraph three.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) The Embassy believes that the five Ogaden zones of Ethiopia are now considered to be a humanitarian crisis. Famine-like conditions are currently present and the risk of widespread disease and mortality is severe. This assessment reflects the consensus among the UN, NGOs, international organizations, and donors and a recent USAID assessment team to the Ogaden. The Embassy will host a meeting of all donors and relief agencies this week to gauge the extent of the crisis. The USG has been moderately successful in raising the humanitarian concerns with the Ethiopian Government (GoE), and the GoE has taken some actions, though inadequate to open corridors for humanitarian relief. While the GoE's claims of the threats of the insurgency, logistical problems, landmines, and inadequate military support are legitimate, the GoE has been the impediment to commercial trade, humanitarian deliveries, international assessments, and relief efforts.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) The Embassy concludes that continued restrictions

placed by the Ethiopian military (ENDF) blocking commercial food shipments from Somalia and humanitarian food deliveries as well as inadequate response by GoE relief services are the main stumbling blocks to relief in the Ogaden. All major donors and relief agencies concur with this assessment. Embassy Addis finds that 1) while we have little information on the extent or scope of humanitarian and/or human rights conditions in the areas of active military activity in the Ogaden region 2) it is clear the main cause for the current situation in the Ogaden, which has always been a vulnerable region to famine-like conditions, has been the GoE's counterinsurgency operations in response to ONLF operations; 3) the GoE is the major impediment to facilitating international efforts to assess and robustly respond to the humanitarian needs of the vulnerable population in the Ogaden; and 4) there is famine-like conditions in the five Ogaden zones of Somali region affecting over 600,000 of the 1.5 million people in the Ogaden zones. If immediate action is not quickly taken to mitigate the current situation, the region will face a high mortality rate.

13. (S/NF) The United States has taken the lead in urging the GoE to respond expeditiously to conditions on the ground and the United Nations has been engaged in protracted negotiations with the GoE to significantly bolster assistance delivery and monitoring capabilities on the ground. UN teams are currently in the region to assess potential monitoring sites. In light of the GoE's inadequate response to necessary action in a sustained manner despite pressure by Post and AF A/S Frazer over the past five months, Post outlines the following course of action for DoS principals to press the GOE immediately to enable a robust response to the current crisis. 1) The Ambassador will call on Prime

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Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum to raise the Ogaden crisis. 2) Africa Bureau Assistant Secretary, and separately USAID Assistant Administrator for Africa, raise the issue with Ambassador Samuel Assefa. 3) The U.S. Embassy will coordinate immediately with the UN agencies, international groups and donors to make a joint approach to the GoE. 4) The State Department and USAID Africa Bureaus will contact senior GoE interlocutors regularly over the coming weeks to underscore the common position of the USG and solicit feedback on the GoE's efforts. 5) Should further action be necessary, we will seek engagement of other senior USG officials. Proposed talking points are provided in paragraph 6 below.

THE KNOWN UNKNOWNNS ABOUT THE OGADEN

14. (C) The UN reported in early September (Ref A) that "pockets of crisis" exist within the Ogaden, with the potential for conditions to slip into a full, regional crisis within two to three months. Despite GoE claims since the UN's assessment that it had begun opening avenues for commercial trade, would facilitate humanitarian relief deliveries, and that Ethiopian military (ENDF) troops had begun returning to their barracks (Ref B), GoE security agencies have actively prevented subsequent security, health, food security assessments -- including by the GoE's own Human Rights Commission -- and has detained commercial and humanitarian food deliveries into the conflict-impacted region. As a result of these impediments, we do not know specific details about the nature, extent, or scope of the following issues:

- Commercial food availability;
- Humanitarian food needs;
- Extent or dynamics of humanitarian food distribution;
- Food prices;
- Extent or rates of malnutrition;
- Availability of medical supplies or care;
- Extent or incidence of disease (particularly

measles or cholera);
--Extent, nature, or impact of insurgent activities;
--Extent, nature, or impact of ENDF
counter-insurgent activities;
--Extent of human rights abuses inflicted upon the
civilian population;
--Extent or cause of reported burning of villages;
--The extent or condition of refugees from Somalia
currently in the region;
--Extent or perpetrating entity laying landmines; or
--The impact of the above on American citizens
(including the 27 American citizens registered
throughout southeastern Ethiopia).

THE KNOWN KNOWNS

15. (C) Despite not knowing the details about the issues laid out above, Post does have significant specific information about the GoE's impediments to further assessing or addressing the humanitarian and human rights needs of the

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affected population. We also have some limited additional information on conditions in specific pockets of the Ogaden since the UN team's visit. Vague details regarding some of the issues below reflect the extent to which information is available in light of existing restrictions.

--Establishing a Local Presence: The GoE has identified the federal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) as the UN's focal point of contact with the GoE and has decided to establish a DPPA office in Dire Dawa to facilitate efforts. The GoE has requested the UN to establish a joint presence at this site as well as in Degehabur and Kebri Dehar. The UN will begin a site security assessment for establishing these offices during the week of October 29.

--Malnutrition Rates: Save the Children UK conducted a nutrition survey with the GoE's permission in safe areas of Fik zone in the Ogaden. The survey found average levels of General Acute Malnutrition (GAM) of 20 percent. Rates of 10 percent generally are considered an emergency in Ethiopia and 15 percent generally triggers intensive therapeutic feeding programs in the Somali region. (Note: As this survey was conducted in areas significantly less impacted than most others in the conflict-affected region, Post and others assess similar or higher GAM rates throughout the Ogaden region. End note.) UNICEF reports that the level of malnutrition of children in the affected areas is now sufficiently high to allow measles and other diseases to sweep through the population, if they emerge as is expected, possibly killing tens of thousands of children as happened with measles in 1999-2000.

--Commercial Food Deliveries: Despite having temporarily opened four commercial trade routes into the Ogaden areas, the GoE has since effectively closed the two routes leading to Somalia (the major traditional source of commercial food to the region) and have detained at least 50 trucks delivering commercial food. The two routes linking the region to other parts of Ethiopia nominally remain open, but NGOs operating in various parts of the affected areas report having seen no commercial traffic.

--Human Rights Assessments: Although the GoE has been silent on the UN's Human Rights report submitted privately to the GoE following the early-September assessment mission, it has sent the government's Human Rights Commission (HRC) for a three week assessment to the region. HRC head Ato Kassa told UNHCHR officials on October 25 that the GoE have prevented the HRC mission from leaving Jijiga, the Somali regional capital which is situated outside of the Ogaden zones. GoE officials further limited HRC team meetings to the Jijiga jail. Despite the restrictions, the HRC team was able to determine that over 700 people had been unlawfully detained

in Jijiga. HRC was unable to confirm reports that over two dozen child soldiers had been imprisoned in Jijiga, but did note that following their visit over 100 individuals had been released from prison. As a result of restrictions, HRC could not assess questions of extrajudicial killings, rapes, burned villages, or the like.

--Humanitarian Food Deliveries: The GoE has decided that it will restrict humanitarian food distributions for the

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estimated 1.5 million people living in affected areas to 45 distribution centers located in woreda (effectively counties) headquarters. Until now, WFP has worked to maintain food deliveries to over 230 distribution sites in the affected areas. WFP assesses that this reduction in distribution sites will effectively prevent a significant percentage of the population from accessing food -- particularly in light of GoE restrictions on the mobility of communities -- and risks facilitating the rapid spread of disease among vulnerable populations forced to congregate. As of late-October, only 81 percent of the June 2007 food aid allocation to the Ogaden areas (6,000 MT) has been delivered.

The single largest trucker of humanitarian food aid in the Somali region, Oogsadi Transport, has decided to cease food aid deliveries because checkpoint delays and waiting for military escorts have caused the normal 7-10 day Dire Dawa-to-Gode round trip to take 28 days.

--Health Centers: The GoE has allowed UNICEF to provide supplies to eight of ten medical centers in the region and has approved the deployment of several mobile health facilities to reach more remote communities.

--A Tight Grip on Implementers: The GoE has insisted that the UN provide a list of "suitable" NGOs to work on relief efforts in the conflict-affected areas. On October 19, the UN provided an exhaustive list of all 37 NGOs currently working in these areas or which have expressed a willingness to do so. The GoE has yet to respond to the list. The GoE has similarly insisted on a list of all UN staff members who will be working in the region along with their home addresses. In light of GoE officials' harassment of family members of UN security staff and similar reports from other aid partners, the UN is reluctant to provide more than staff members' names. The UN has rejected the GoE's request that it submit a list of names 50 percent longer than the number of staff members needed from which the GoE would select "acceptable" staff members.

--A Shift From Troops to Militias: The UN Security Chief and reliable contacts within the Somali regional government report that while the ENDF has returned a large portion of its troops to their barracks, the Somali regional government has ordered civil servants throughout the region to mobilize their clans and communities to form and support militias to counter the ONLF insurgents.

--Security Assessments: The GoE has rejected all UN requests for regular security assessments in the region, limiting the UN's regional security officer in theater to the town of Jijiga. Local officials have harassed the UN security officer in the Somali region, with the officer returning home to find security officials interrogating his children. While the GoE has appointed Deputy Chief of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), Ato Shimelis, as the point of contact for the UN on security in the region, all military commanders in the region who previously provided security information to the UN have been gagged, now referring the UN to the Foreign Ministry.

--Livestock Trade: The GoE has informed FAO that livestock trade conditions are not problematic and has rejected FAO

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requests to support livestock destocking and trade facilitation efforts. While the GoE has agreed in principle to allow FAO to conduct an assessment of livestock trade conditions, livestock markets have collapsed stripping pastoralists of the ability to earn cash to buy grain and forcing pastoralists to eat much of their breeding stocks.

--Somali Refugees: The GoE has informed UNHCR that it does not consider the estimated 12,000 Somalis in the Ogaden area who have fled insecurity in Somalia to be refugees because the GoE has determined that the current situation in Somalia does not warrant such status. As such, the GoE has refused to engage UNHCR on these individuals.

TALKING POINTS

16. (C) In light of the above, it has become clear to Post that, despite diplomatic interventions to date, the GoE has not responded in a quick, adequate, and sustained manner to the humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden. As conditions on the ground are now considered to be a "humanitarian crisis", Post believes that strong and direct pressure from the United States Government in concert with other donors is necessary. Post proposes the following talking points for Washington principals, dialogue with senior Ethiopian officials:

--The United States is deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis that has emerged in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia. The USG strongly requests that Ethiopia take all possible action to facilitate the immediate and sustained response to prevent this crisis from spreading or intensifying.

--The United States understands and appreciates that Ethiopia is facing an active insurgency in this region which it must respond to, but we call on the Ethiopian Government to make every effort to mitigate the humanitarian impact that the conflict is having.

-- The United States has committed \$18.7 million in humanitarian relief and is committed to helping with food and medicine for the region and throughout Ethiopia. We will also work with other countries to provide support.

--Existing commercial food routes have proven inadequate, checkpoints and escort delays are slowing the delivery of critically needed food aid, and malnutrition rates risk allowing diseases to sweep through the local population if they take hold.

--The solutions include:

- Immediately open additional commercial trade routes internally and to Somalia,
- Streamline checkpoint procedures,
- Expedite escorts for food delivery convoys,
- Authorize the maximum number of food aid distribution sites,

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- Authorize and facilitate assessment and monitoring teams to gauge conditions and progress, and
- Urgently facilitate the immediate deployment of UN agencies and NGOs to provide medical and humanitarian support.

--Working together we can avoid a humanitarian crisis.

End Talking Points.

COMMENT

[17](#). (S/NF) Resolution to mitigate adequately the spread and intensity of this humanitarian crisis demands immediate action, otherwise Ethiopia will see another widespread famine on our watch. Furthermore, international press, diaspora criticism, and increased concern from the international community will only become more vocal. The Senate could rapidly pass HR 2003 if mortality rates increase dramatically. Post is convening a meeting of UN agencies, NGOs, and donor partners on October 31 to coordinate action in raising the humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden directly and quietly but forcefully with the GoE. Post is now finalizing a plan for a USG assessment mission to the conflict-affected areas to be presented to the GoE in the coming days as well. While post is taking these necessary actions Department and USAID support at senior levels is crucial now. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO